

What are the penalties for breaking Food Stamps rules?

If you break any of the Food Stamp Program rules, you may become ineligible to receive Food Stamps for a specified period of time. In some cases, you may become ineligible forever.

- You must not quit your job or cut your hours without good reason. Talk to your caseworker if you have questions about good reasons to quit your job or cut back your hours.
- If you are found guilty of buying illegal drugs with Food Stamps, you will not be able to get Food Stamps for two (2) years.
- If you misuse your EBT card on purpose, you may no longer get Food Stamps. You may also be fined up to \$250,000, be sent to jail for up to 20 years, or both. Misuse of an EBT card means changing, selling, or trading the card, using someone else's card without permission, or exchanging benefits.
- If you are found guilty of selling your Food Stamps instead of using them to buy food, you will never be able to get Food Stamps again.

What are my rights?

- If you disagree with an action taken on your case you may ask us for a Fair Hearing, either in writing or by calling 1-800-462-0134.
- We keep the information on your application form confidential. We will only use this information as needed to administer the Food Stamp program, with one exception. The exception is that we must give law enforcement officers the address, Social Security number and photograph of anyone who gets Food Stamps who is a fleeing felon, or is violating parole or probation. We must also give this information to law enforcement officers about someone who may know something about a felony.

You Have The Right to Make a Discrimination Complaint

You have the right to make a discrimination complaint if you think we have taken action against you because of your race, color, religious creed, sex, marital status, age, national origin, ancestry, criminal record, political beliefs, sexual orientation, mental retardation, mental disability, learning disability or physical disability, including but not limited to blindness.

An individual with a disability may request and receive a reasonable accommodation or special help from the department when special help is necessary to allow the individual to have an equal and meaningful opportunity to participate in the programs administered by the department.

If you asked for an accommodation or special help and we refused to provide the special help, you may make a complaint to the department's Affirmative Action Division Director or any of the agencies listed below.

You or someone representing you can write to or call one or more of these agencies to make a discrimination complaint:

Commissioner of the Department of Social Services
Attention: Affirmative Action Division Director/ADA Coordinator,
25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5033
Telephone: 1-860-424-5040 (TDD: 1-800-842-4524)

Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities
21 Grand Street, Hartford, CT 06106
Telephone: 1-860-541-3400 (TDD: 1-860-541-3459)

**US Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Civil Rights, Region 1**
JFK Federal Building, Room 1875, Boston, MA 02203
Telephone: 1-617-565-1340 (TDD: 1-617-565-1343)

**US Department of Agriculture
Office of Civil Rights (Food Stamps only)**
Whitten Building, Room 326-W
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410
Telephone/ TDD: 1-202-720-5964

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This information is available in alternate formats. Phone (800) 842-1508 or TDD/TTY (800) 842-4524



What are Food Stamps?

The Food Stamp program helps people buy food. The Federal government created the program to help people with low incomes eat well to stay healthy. If you are eligible, we put your Food Stamp benefits in an electronic bank account. We will give you a plastic Electronic Benefits Transfer "EBT" card to use to buy food at stores that take Food Stamps. You can use your EBT card at most grocery stores and at some Farmers' Markets.

You may be able to get Food Stamps within seven days if:

- Your household's income is less than \$150 per month and your household's assets are less than \$100 (assets include cash on hand and money you have in the bank),
- Your rent and utilities are more than your monthly income before deductions, or
- You are a migrant seasonal farm worker *and* your household's cash and money in the bank is less than \$100.

If these situations don't apply, you may receive Food Stamps within 30 days of the date we receive your application.

Are you eligible?

Your eligibility for Food Stamps and the amount of your Food Stamp benefit depends on:

- How many people you live with, which we call your household.
- How much income your household has each month (current limit is 130% of the Federal Poverty Level, unless you are 60 or older or have a disability).
- What assets your household has (less than \$2,000, or \$3,000 if a person 60 or older or a person receiving disability income is in your household). We do not count motor vehicles or the home you live in as assets.
- And how much your household has to pay each month for things like rent or mortgage, utilities, child care, and child support.
- We also consider medical expenses if anyone in your household is at least 60 years old or disabled.

How do I get Food Stamps?

1. Get an application.

You can get an application at your local Department of Social Services (DSS) office, call to have one mailed to you, or get one through the Internet at www.ct.gov/dss

2. Fill out the application.

The more information you give us now, the faster we can find out if you are eligible and how much Food Stamps you should get. You can:

- Fill it out yourself,
- Have someone help you,
- Have a DSS worker help you

3. Mail or bring the application to the DSS office nearest you.

- Drop it off in person,
- Mail it, or
- Fax it

Call Infoline at 211 to find the address and phone number of the DSS office nearest you.

4. Have an interview

We will assign an eligibility worker to help you. The worker will tell you the date and time to come for the interview. We usually have the interview at the local DSS office. If you cannot go to the DSS office, call them and ask them to do the interview by phone. Make sure you give them a phone number where they can reach you. **Or** you can authorize someone you trust to go to the interview for you.

You can see if you might be eligible for Food Stamps by completing the eligibility pre-screener on the internet at www.ctfoodstamps.org

What does the application ask for?

The application asks questions about:

- You and the people that live with you (your household),
- Your household's income from working or from other sources, such as Social Security,
- Your household's assets, such as savings and checking accounts, stocks, bonds, etc.,
- Your household's expenses for rent/mortgage, utilities, child support, child care, and medical expenses.

What do I need to bring to my interview? (please bring all of these items)

- Proof of identity (driver's license, etc.),
- Social Security #'s for everyone in your household,
- Proof of earnings for anyone in your household who works (pay stubs for last 4 weeks),
- Income tax return if you are self-employed,
- Proof of all other income (such as child support paid directly to you),
- Proof of shelter costs (rent receipt, mortgage coupon, utility bill, lease, etc.),
- Current bank statements for checking and savings accounts, credit union accounts, certificates of deposit, retirement accounts, stocks, bonds, dividends, etc.,
- Proof of dependant care costs (cancelled checks, statement from provider, receipts, etc.),
- If anyone is 60 or older or disabled, proof of medical expenses you pay out of your own pocket,
- Proof of child support payments and obligation,
- Proof of your immigration status if you are not a U.S. citizen

How is my information verified?

■ We verify the identity and eligibility of all people in your Food Stamp household who are applying for Food Stamps by using their Social Security numbers. If someone lives with you but is not applying for Food Stamps, you do not have to give us their Social Security Number. However, if you give us all the Social Security numbers, DSS may be able to process your application faster. We will do a computer match of the Social Security numbers against Federal, state and local government computer files.

■ We may be able to verify information about child support payments that are paid to the state on behalf of your child with the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement.

■ We will request any information available about you and your household from the Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS). We will use the information we receive to process your application. We will get this information from the Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service. We may also get information from other agencies when allowed by law and/or contact other sources, such as banks and employers, ourselves. The results may affect your household's eligibility for Food Stamps and the amount of Food Stamps your household gets.

What are my responsibilities?

You must follow all Food Stamp program rules to keep getting Food Stamps.

- You must tell the truth about your identity and where you live. If you are not truthful, you will not be able to get Food Stamps for up to 10 years.
- There are rules about when you must report changes in your household circumstances.

What are my responsibilities?

(continued)

■ These rules are different for each program. We will send you a notice with the rules for the programs you receive assistance from when your case is granted. No matter what programs you are on, it is very important to tell us when you move. If you do not tell us, we will not be able to send you your appointment notice for your redetermination of eligibility and we will close your case. If this happens you will have to reapply.

■ You must cooperate with state and Federal workers in a Quality Control review, if your case is chosen for review. We do Quality Control reviews to make sure we processed your application correctly.

How long can I receive Food Stamps?

If you are an able-bodied adult and you do not live with any children under age 18, Federal Law limits the amount of time you can get Food Stamps if you are not working. If you do not work, or are not in an approved work program, you can only get Food Stamps for three months in a three-year period. This law does not apply if any of the following statements are true:

- You are age 17 or younger.
- You are age 50 or older.
- You have a medical reason that keeps you from being able to work.
- You live with a child who is age 17 or younger.
- You are pregnant.
- You are excused from registering for the Food Stamp Employment & Training Program. Your worker will tell you if you are excused.